

The 'Guardians of the Earth': Dustin Fosskett

The 'Guardians of the Earth': Indigenous Bolivia and Global Activism Concerning Climate Change in the
Twenty First Century

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Introduction

After more than a century of industrialization and global capitalism, scientists and conscious citizens in every country recognize that the planet is going through anthropogenic warming and that in the near future major environmental catastrophes will threaten much of life on Earth. If we are to prevent major global climate upheavals the way industry and commercial practices interact with the environment must be redefined. Such practices destroy large tracts of natural areas and eventually kill off entire ecosystems. In scientific literature, scientists and environmental activists worldwide now demand changes in our environmental practices.

In Bolivia, where this global phenomenon is turning some regions into desert, these alarming effects have prompted the Bolivian indigenous government to take a fast-track approach to reforming the economic and environmental practices that dominate the world today. The purpose of my thesis is to analyze the historical role of Bolivia in the global movement against climate change during the last decade and to explore the ideological and cultural bases of such involvement. I argue that by challenging global capitalism's inherent drive for expansion through official and communitarian activism against climate change, Bolivia becomes a case study for how and why an indigenous nation can peacefully and constructively transform neo-Liberalism and capitalism. Bolivia stands at a unique crossroads of ancient and culturally assertive cosmologies and a profound 21st century critique of the process of the global commoditization of nature.

Bolivia is a land-locked nation in the heart of the Andes mountains of South America. Roughly 65% of its population is indigenous representing three major groups, the Aymara, Quechua and Guarani. In a land of ancient civilizations, Bolivian indigenous peoples endured

the hardships of Spanish colonialism and the more modern neocolonial economy and internal Creole colonialism of the 20th century through a persistent mass movement of people.

Bolivia has deep-rooted environmental beliefs that date back centuries. As a result, it has proposed many national policies against environmental depredation, such as the “Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth” and the “Ten Commandments.” At the global level, Bolivia has presented its views opposing climate change and neo-liberalism on major platforms such as the Copenhagen Summit of 2009 and the Cancun Summit of 2010, and through such international agreements as the REDD (Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation). By doing so, Bolivia has revealed that the environmental movement is not homogenous. Many environmental grassroots organizations have voiced concern over the efficacy of the proposals at these “summits” and, interestingly enough, many now support the proposals of the indigenous communities around the world. This has been evident in the world conferences such as the “World’s Peoples Conference” in April 2010 in Cochabamba, Bolivia, where Bolivia proposed solutions to the problem of climate change that the world had never seen before. It is on these global platforms as well as through national grassroots movements and policies that Bolivia has voiced its unique position against the expansion of unchecked commoditization of the natural world.

Understanding the views of an indigenous culture that has a long history of ecological preservation and learning their environment proposals could prove to be beneficial not only for the planet but for American diplomacy as well. If the U.S. continues to engage in currently predominant economic and environmental practices and ignores ideas being proposed by other nations to combat the global climate crisis, it will become a threat to its own people. As other nations openly discuss options to save humanity and the environment, it is important that the

people in this country open their ears so as to be able to enter the debate and imagine what actions the world might take to preserve life on the planet.

I will first approach my topic by explaining the notions of Andean cosmology and eco-socialism, which I consider the pillars of the Bolivian road to environmental leadership in the local and global arena. I then show how the recent history of communitarian struggles for water, natural gas and the defense of ancestral traditions not only have shaped the current consciousness and ecological diplomacy of Bolivian president Evo Morales and Bolivia as a nation, but also provide a context for Bolivia's unique form of "communitarian socialism." The final section of this study explains in more detail the debate over climate change and Bolivia's participation in it. I do that by contrasting the proposals of the developed nations with those of Bolivia, and by analyzing more closely Bolivia's environmental policies.

Conceptual Discussion

To make sense of Bolivia, an Andean indigenous and "developing" nation, and its relatively recent emergence as a leader in the global arena of the environmental movement, we need to understand its dual influence. Andean ecological activism is rooted in both Andean ancestral cosmologies and in more contemporary understandings of eco-socialism. Andeans view themselves as an integral part of nature and they relate to the natural and supernatural world, as well as to other humans, on the basis of reciprocity. Reciprocity is the understanding that humans and nature are inextricably connected by a permanent exchange of reciprocal nourishment, which translates into Andean spiritual practices. From nature, humans receive the life force that sustains them (water, air, sun, earth and food), and they in turn, are expected to feed and take care of nature. Such an exchange also regulates the cultural relationships between members of the native communities, those between communities and their authorities, and, on a

higher level, those between colonized peoples and their colonizers, at least until the Spanish arrived in the Andes in the 1530s.¹

This cosmological perspective is evident in the ancient myths still preserved today in central Peru, which are now reproduced in the *Huarochiri Manuscript*.² In this testament of ancient Andean religious views there is a story that represents the notion of reciprocity in its most basic form. In this narrative, a major Andean deity or Huaca named Paria Caca has already been victorious over the region of the Yauyo people. As he is roaming the land he finds a woman and he requests sexual intercourse. She agrees, but only on the condition that he first repair the water source for her fields. He does so, and satisfied with the cooperation, she willingly engages in sex. Here a reciprocal exchange between two groups is symbolized: Paria Caca, representing the dominant group, improves the water source (presumably by using worker's strength and the skill of canal building) and in exchange the woman (representing the dominated group) has sex with him, an activity that also symbolizes intermarriage between the groups that essentially unites them through ties of kinship.³ These myths were passed down orally through the generations to help maintain both the Andean culture and a cosmological balance between humans and nature.

Nature gives the people wisdom and the resources needed to care for the natural world. The coca plant is perhaps the example that best illustrates this relationship. Coca is sacred to Andeans and they liken the leaves to God because as they chew the leaves and study them, the

¹ Solomon, Frank. George L. Urioste, *The Huarochiri Manuscript: A testament of Ancient and Colonial Andean Religion*. University of Texas Press, 1991. Introduction

² *Huarochiri Manuscript*. Chapter 16.

³ Ibid.

leaves impart wisdom.⁴ Every plant and animal is important to the survival of humankind. Andeans know that without the plants and animals, humans could not live and therefore they take care of these beings as though they were an organic part of themselves. They believe that what happens to the plants and animals will in turn affect them due to a process in which they are intimately linked with them. They believe that the Earth is their place of origin and that one day they will return to it.⁵

Earth is considered to be the Mother. In fact, the Andean word for Earth is Pachamama which translates into Mother Earth. Pacha is a reference to time, space and the universe, all of which are divided into a netherworld, earth and heaven. Space encapsulates time and thus on Earth historical events take place and are contained and produced by her. Pachamama is a symbol of natural fertility and is a universal deity of the natural process that results in the endless cycle of death and rebirth.⁶ Pachamama is everywhere and is in everything, so it is she who sustains life in the universal. Thus, Andean indigenous people engage in ecological activism as part of their commitment to take care of Pachamama as well as for their own survival.

This cosmovision of the Andean indigenous can be further exemplified in the self perception of their neighbors the Kogi peoples of northern Colombia. The Kogi chose to isolate themselves from the western world and any form of modern technology and consumerism as a result of the imposition of a destructive lifestyle by European colonizers in the 1600s. Their way of life and their indigenous belief system has thus continued in isolation until the present, and in their lifestyles and culture they seek to maintain harmony with the natural world.

⁴ Joseph W. Bastien. "South American Indians: Indians of the Modern Andes." *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Ed. Lindsay Jones. Vol. 13 2nd ed. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, (2005). 8614-8621.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

The Kogi view themselves as the guardians of the Earth. Because they believe that the world is incompetent to care for the Earth, they have recently decided to make contact with the western world. They believe that westerners, or the “younger brother,” are raping the Earth and that this rape is intensifying. The Kogi believe that the droughts, the melting ice and the heating of the atmosphere are all a result of the actions of this younger brother who has ripped the Earth apart for profit. As the caretakers of the Earth, they believe that it is their duty to inform the modern world that before it is too late, it needs to change the way it is interacting with nature or the ecological crisis will only continue to worsen. The Kogi view themselves as the “elder brother” who is responsible for teaching and warning the “younger brother” how to care for the Earth.⁷ This characterization of the Kogi as the elder brother and the west as the younger brother explains how the indigenous do not view the rest of humanity as alien or as an enemy but rather as an immature family member who needs to grow up and be responsible for how he engages the Earth.

The general view of Andean indigenous peoples’ cosmology discussed above explains the central place of nature and the care of nature in Andean life. Maintaining cosmological balance is then, fundamental for social and political balance. Thus it is understandable that indigenous peoples and their governments give priority to ecological issues. Because Bolivia’s environmental activism and global advocacy are rooted in an ancestral understanding of the deep spiritual relationship between humans and Earth, the environmental declarations and proposals that Bolivia has presented to the U.N. make sense. Understanding this historical and cultural connection demonstrates that Bolivian intentions in promoting ecological balance go well beyond attempts to gain mere economic or political advantages.

⁷ Alan, Ereira. “The Making of the Heart of the World: Representation and the Kogi.” *Public Archeology*, Vol. 4 issue 2/3, (2005). 163-168.

Eco-socialism is a more contemporary ideology at the basis of Bolivian activism. Eco-socialists believe that the crisis in nature is ecological and demands a shift in the way we view human relationships with nature in order to address the issue effectively. It is vital first and foremost to acknowledge the crisis as ecological because as long as humans view themselves as being outside nature, they will continue to harm it through their exploitative activities. In this sense, eco-socialists share some of the Andean ancestral understanding of humans and nature as a single organism. Eco-socialism defines the crisis in terms of ecology as opposed to the environment because for eco-socialists the environment is defined as a “set of things outside us with no essential order,” while an ecology, is a “whole defined by internal relations.”⁸ The environments of the world can be listed and numbered, as opposed to the ecologies, which cannot. The environment can be looked at as external to human activity rather than as interconnected with nature or as a “dimension of the human world” and part of many eco-systems of the planet.⁹ Human activity that affects aspects of nature can have ramifications across the planet that end up hurting humans in one shared cycle of cause and effect, producing a sort of boomerang effect.

An example of an eco-socialist view of an ecological crisis can be seen in the eco-socialist view of the warming of the oceans. The waters of the oceans have warmed about 1.8 degrees Fahrenheit over the course of the twentieth century. Oxygen in the water is depleted because warm waters hold less of it than colder water. As a result, the kelp and zooplankton die off and massive migrations of fish move into new waters, which in turn depletes the deep ocean floor of nutrients needed to sustain the life there. Another effect of warming waters is the dying off of corals, which have declined by up to 80-90 percent in the Indian and Pacific oceans.

⁸ Joel Kovel, *The Enemy of Nature: The End of Capitalism or the End of the World?* (Zed Books Ltd, 2002), 17 and 90.

⁹ Kovel, p. 90.

Further, the pollution of ocean water by sewage increases bacteria and viruses, which infect shellfish and the people who harvest them. Ocean warming and pollution in turn deplete the world's fish population which is now being overfished as well. This ultimately has life threatening effects on human beings in society.¹⁰ Defining the crisis as environmental in this case, then, would not reveal the truly global, species-spanning ramifications of our actions, whereas approaching the issue from an eco-socialist perspective makes this clear.

At the heart of eco-socialism is the idea that the capitalist system is the driving force behind the destruction of the world's ecosystems and for the disparity between the rich and the poor. For eco-socialists, capitalism inherently overcomes any barriers that limits its own expansion. Because capitalism needs to expand, a "generalized commodity production" inevitably overwhelms the ecological balance¹¹. This idea suggests that capital constantly needs to turn nature into a commodity and that it must continue to do so or it will fail to function. Given that capitalism has prevailed globally after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, the commoditization of nature will not cease and the ecological crisis will ensue. Therefore, if the current global economic model of capitalism is not radically transformed, the scientific predictions of global-environmental catastrophe will be unavoidable. Eco-socialists then propose to the world that human beings only have two options: we can keep capitalism and destroy the environment and humankind, or we can implement alternative economic systems to global capitalism.

Eco-socialists acknowledge that capitalism affects the indigenous most, and this helps one understand why indigenous communities might subscribe to this sort of political ideology.

¹⁰ Kovel, pp. 16-17

¹¹ Kovel, pp. 41-42.

Eco-socialists believe that the indigenous communities who have a long history of imperialistic interventions are among the groups most negatively impacted by capitalism. They argue that, if left unresolved, imperialist elites will continue to dominate the global south and the crisis of social inequality will continue to worsen. The idea of class rule will be perpetuated and, at worst, the end result will be that human life will not survive¹². Yet eco-socialism does not simply place blame on the global capitalist system for social and environmental depredations. Rather, it also offers solutions that are alternatives to the current dominant economic system.

The socialist element of eco-socialism becomes most clear in eco-socialist strategies aimed at stopping the ecological destruction inherent in capitalism. Eco-socialists propose an end to the separation of the means of production from the laborer. Historically, when the means of production have been taken away from the laborer, then the need for those means of production has been met through the private enterprise. If such separation no longer occurs, eco-socialists believe, then the need for big private investors and profits disappears. Their second proposal is that people be allowed to “self-determine their own productive power,” meaning that they should not have an outside enterprise dictating to them what their country or community should produce. In sum, eco-socialists call for an end to the global economic model of capitalism.¹³

At the 2007 Paris Eco-socialist Conference, the world’s leading eco-socialist activists issued the Belem Eco-socialist Declaration. The declaration gives an outline for a healthier planet, and a better lifestyle that is in harmony with nature and seeks alternatives to the capitalist model. The Belem Eco-socialist Declaration has been supported by more than 400 global

¹² Belem Eco-socialist Declaration, December 16, 2008. <http://climateandcapitalism.com/?p=597>

¹³ Kovel, p. 150.

activists from 34 different countries. This declaration aims at transforming the current economic model into one that will be sustainable for humanity and nature. The declaration proposes that complete sectors of industry (food, oil, lumber, etc.,) must be restructured and suppressed while new ones are simultaneously developed. It emphasizes that the industrial, agricultural, and social restructuring must include the most oppressed members of human society which are defined as the impoverished indigenous peoples. The declaration states that these peoples' demands will help define what constitutes ecological and economic sustainability.¹⁴

Other proposals from the declaration include replacing oil and carbon-based energy systems with clean sources of power (geothermal energy, wave, wind and solar energy) and with bio-fuels. The declaration acknowledges that these changes will take a long time to actualize and does not expect an immediate transformation. However, it does demand immediate changes to government, corporate and international institutional practices. Such immediate changes include a drastic reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, the full development of clean energy, the creation of free public transportation systems and the creation of cleanup programs focused on reducing pollution. These ideas are hardly new, but the declaration stresses the key point that these sources of power must be community controlled.¹⁵

The Belem Eco-socialist Declaration is not a policy or demand of any nation or government. It is merely a proposal by some former Green Party members and intellectual activists of the socially progressive environmental movement of eco-socialism. The thoughts and policies of the indigenous Bolivians, however, seem to subscribe to the diagnosis and

¹⁴ Belem Eco-Socialist Declaration, Document.

¹⁵ This idea of community control is reminiscent of the Bolivian government's struggle against the privatization of resources and forms the core of Evo Morales' notion of "communitarian socialism," which I describe in my discussion of the Bolivian government's alternatives to global capitalism.

proposals of eco-socialism. As we shall see, in president Evo Morales' "Ten Commandments," Bolivia has actually proposed to the world transformative economic and social policies that are directly in line with eco-socialist ideology.¹⁶

Brief History of Bolivian Communitarian Struggles

The current Bolivian approach to "communitarian socialism," which includes a global environmental platform, is the result of decades, if not centuries, of grassroots mobilizations against poverty and exclusion. For nearly three decades western countries and International Governmental Organizations (IGOs) have imposed neo-liberal policies with the argument that these policies will increase democracy and wealth after global recession has become more frequent. For the indigenous state of Bolivia, 20th century neo-liberalism has failed to actualize such promises; this failure in neo-liberalism has created distrust between the over-developed nations and the undeveloped indigenous state. The failure of a dependent model of industrialization became evident in the 1980s with a major foreign debt crisis. The crisis paved the way for the IMF and the World Bank to impose structural adjustment programs and trade liberalization, promoting the free export and import of products across international borders in order to increase competition. Latin American governments cut government employment, froze wages in the public sector, reduced import tariffs, devalued their currencies and privatized public resources. These adjustment programs are typical neo-liberal policies and are exactly what the IMF imposed in Bolivia in the mid-1980s in order to stabilize the economic turmoil of the

¹⁶ The eco-socialist movement to help combat climate change is occurring all over the world in countries such as: Australia, China, parts of Europe and other areas of Latin America as well. The eco-socialist theory has been elaborated on among others by Derek Wall (2010) and John Bellamy Foster (1994).

previous decades.¹⁷ The imposition of these policies through military presence also created distrust and contradicted democratic ideals.

Bolivia's resistance to neo-liberal policies focused on struggles against the privatization of Bolivia's public resources. Much of Bolivia's recent history of resistance to neo-liberalism has gravitated around three major grassroots movements: the resistance of coca farmers to U.S. and Bolivian policies attempting to eradicate coca farms; resistance to the privatization of water (the "Water War"), and mobilization against the privatization of gas ("Gas War"). Ultimately the current Bolivian government was born out of an indigenous revolution that ousted neo-liberalism from the country through a movement focused on securing for the people the natural elements that are sacred for them as part of nature and its products.

The fight over coca was engendered by the neo-liberal policies that started in the mid-1980s, deeply affecting Bolivian miners as the government began to sell off state owned industries, such as tin and silver mines. Many lost their jobs and unemployment rose to 30%. Unemployed miners were transferred to Cochabamba where they turned to newer ways of supporting their families, such as coca farming, which increased 60% in 1986.¹⁸ Although many Bolivians depended on coca farming, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Bolivian government began working with the United States to eradicate coca production. This eradication policy engendered a massive resistance from the indigenous peasant communities in the Cochabamba region. Coca leaves are used medicinally in the Andean region and have been for centuries; Bolivians use them to alleviate the pangs of hunger and to fight altitude sickness. They relentlessly pressured the government to withdraw their hard

¹⁷ Jenkins Rhys, "Trade Liberalisation in Latin America: The Bolivian Case," *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (1997): pp.308-309.

¹⁸ Teo Ballve and Vijay Prashad, *Dispatches from Latin America: on the frontlines against neoliberalism*, (Cambridge, MA. : South End Press, 2006), 398.

line against coca farming and as a result the Bolivian government backed off in 1992.¹⁹ By 2002, the continued resistance forced the U.S.-backed military program known as the Expeditionary Task Force, a military program that implemented the eradication of all coca farms, to be disbanded. By 2004, the government had permitted the growing of coca in its most lucrative region of the Chapare.²⁰ The indigenous peasants, including woman and children, banded together to fight for the sacred coca plant. Under the leadership of Evo Morales they formed the cocalero union and fought in massive social mobilizations and road blocks against the government to denounce the military intervention of the U.S. in Bolivia and Latin America as part of the “war on drugs.”²¹

When access to water, the source of life, and according to Andean cosmology, life itself, was challenged by global corporations, Bolivians revived their tradition of protest and collective action. In September of 1999, Bechtel, a U.S. multinational corporation and its subsidiary International Water Limited were able to get a grant from the Bolivian government that gave them private ownership of the country’s most valuable basic resource.²² The incentive for the government to pursue this course of action came after in the form of 600 million dollars in debt relief offered by the World Bank in exchange for the privatization of the country’s water works. In fact, the World Bank made loans to the Bolivian government conditional upon the privatization of the water supply. Another condition set by the World Bank forbade “public subsidies” to try to prevent increases in water prices.²³ This stipulation made Bolivians extremely vulnerable to price hikes and stripped them of the support of their government. Simultaneously, the state weakened many social and economic policies, as government spending was cut, many industries and services were privatized,

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ballve and Prashad, p.157.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Susan Spronk, “Roots of Resistance to Urban Water Privatization in Bolivia: The “New Working Class”, the crisis of neoliberalism, and public services.” *International Labor and Working Class History Issue*, 71 (Spring 2007): 15.

²³ Oscar Olivera, *Cochabamba! Water War in Bolivia* (MA: South End Press, 2004), 8.

union and labor laws were weakened and the financial sector was deregulated.²⁴ The Bolivian government also placed restrictions on Bolivians who were not connected to any central water system and therefore could not be charged by the private company. These restrictions came in the form of Law 2029 which did much to shut down Bolivians' ability to collect water independently. Bolivians who were not connected to the central water system gathered water through communal wells. They also had transportation systems in place where Bolivians who lived in the city would carry water to those in the rural areas. The law made it illegal for people to keep the wells that were already in their houses unless they paid to use them; if they did not pay, the wells would be capped.²⁵ Law 2029 even made it illegal for the community to construct collection tanks to collect rainwater. In the eyes of the "Cochabambinos," even the rain was now privatized, which seemed to be a direct assault on their way of life and survival because water to the Bolivians is considered to be a sacred element.²⁶

As a result of privatization, Bolivia's water prices increased 200% and in some cases even 300%.²⁷ All of these classic neo-liberal actions precipitated a massive wave of indigenous peaceful protests on February 4 of 2000 that attempted, unsuccessfully, to break up the monopoly on private ownership of water. Tens of thousands of Bolivians came out to protest the government and were met by military and tear gas. As the soldiers fought against the mobilization of Bolivians, more and more people became sympathetic to the cause and eventually thousands filled the streets in resistance to the government. Two days of peaceful protest and military repression continued until on February 6th the government made a concession, agreeing to freeze price hikes on the water.²⁸ By

²⁴ Ballve and Prashad, p. 153.

²⁵ Olivera, pp. 8-9.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Olivera, p. 10.

²⁸ Olivera, pp. 34-36.

March, the people discovered that the Congress had decided to consider the people's demands but that nothing would be changed.²⁹ This resulted in continued resistance by the people. By April 4th, the people demanded that the government withdraw all privatization contracts, which created military and community conflict for five more days during which time dozens of indigenous protestors lost their lives. When the government realized that the people would not give up the fight for the right to water it began to concede. Finally, on April 9, the government's resistance broke under the pressure of the indigenous peoples and Bechtel had to leave the country.³⁰ Bolivia's indigenous peoples' victory in the Water War began a momentous cycle of activism from 2000 to the present that has helped pave the way for an opening up of the political system. After centuries of social exclusion by the majority, the Bolivian indigenous now had a platform to have their voices be heard. Their political struggle has persisted which has led to further struggles against neo-liberalism and the right to control basic resources.

The Gas War, for instance, was the result of another government attempt to privatize national natural resources to the advantage of foreign-owned oil and gas companies.³¹ When Bolivia's President Sanchez de Lozada attempted to close a deal in 2003 that would allow Bolivia's oil to move through a Chilean port to a San Diego based company, protestors took to the streets. The first mobilizations in September of 2003 involved between fifty and sixty thousand people in the central square of Cochabamba. This mobilization was bigger than the first during the Water War. In a show of solidarity massive mobilizations organized all over the country and a march on La Paz took place as well. The total number of protesters around the country numbered more than two million

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Spronk, p.17.

³¹ Ballve and Prashad, pp.167-168.

people.³² The struggle between the people and the military force of the government resulted in the deaths of 33 civilians, the nationalization of Bolivia's oil and the overthrow of Bolivia's president.³³ Many analysts acknowledge this moment in history as the expulsion of private foreign control and the end of neo-liberalism in Bolivia.³⁴

However, Bolivia did not end the fight against neoliberal policies at its own borders. Instead it exposed its struggle to communities around the world with the election of the country's first indigenous president, Evo Morales of the Aymara peoples. With the rise of Evo Morales, neo-liberalism was expelled from the country and a new nation-building process began. For the first time in its history since the Spanish conquest, the indigenous population of Bolivia is represented in government. This revolution in the nation was the result of resistance to the west and explains why Bolivia is so aggressive in its attacks on current environmental proposals. This recent history along with a long-standing resistance to colonial and neocolonial impositions explains why indigenous peoples in Bolivia have such a lack of faith in the western model. The model of neo-liberal privatization has been neither equitable nor environmentally sound.

Building a New Plurinational State in Bolivia

As a presidential candidate, Morales ran on a platform of environmental preservation and anti-capitalist ideas. On January 22nd 2006, Morales won the presidency with 53.7% of the vote.³⁵ During his acceptance speech he recounted Bolivia's history of economic exploitation and expressed his view that the time for the indigenous to rule Bolivia had come and that it should continue to be so for the next 500 years. He acknowledged that the rise of the indigenous movement was a direct

³² Olivera, p. 178.

³³ Ballve and Prashad, p. 168.

³⁴ Ballve and Prashad, p. 161.

³⁵ World Factbook, Central Intelligence Agency, 2008. (Evo Morales 2006 election).

result of the previous neo-liberal policies that had caused so much turmoil in this country.³⁶ Now that neo-liberalism has been expelled from the country, Bolivia is challenging at the global level the inefficacy of the western approach to life and economics in the fight against anthropogenic climate change.

Following the tenets of eco-socialism, Morales connected the exploitation of natural resources to global capitalism, and suggested that the survival of the planet depends on the elimination of capitalism, and its replacement with a new communitarian socialism.³⁷ Unlike the classical 20th century forms of socialism, where socialist groups took over the economic and political institutions of the government after armed revolutions and immediately began restructuring the capitalist system, communitarian socialism is described as a slow process of socialism.³⁸ Here, communitarian socialism would offer wealth distribution that reflects Bolivia's indigenous heritage. As historian Roger Burbach writes, "It will break with the state-centered socialism of the last century, and will be driven by grassroots social movements that construct an alternative order from the bottom up."³⁹ It is also suggested that communitarian socialism will reflect the needs of each society differently, since not all economic and political models work for every culture⁴⁰. Just like eco-socialism, communitarian socialism seeks an alternative to the current economic system because it is responsible for environmental depredation. Since it prioritizes restoring ecological balance and it empowers the collectivism of Andean cultures, communitarian socialism is more likely to enjoy support by Bolivians. Morales' reforms are aimed at transforming the basis of current political and economic models of global capitalism. One of his major weapons in his arsenal is his use of the

³⁶ Ballve and Prashad, p. 140.

³⁷ Roger Burbach, *Communitarian Socialism in Bolivia*, April 5, 2010.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

environmental crisis of climate change to gain the global support that he needs to legitimize his and Bolivia's grassroots movement on the global level. Communitarian socialism is elaborated on in Morales' "Ten Commandments."⁴¹

Consistent with the ideas of eco-socialism, communitarian socialism, and Andean cosmology, Morales's "Ten Commandments for the Future of the Earth" offer global program to stop potential environmental upheaval. This program includes opposition to imperialism and colonialism, including the privatization of natural resources; support of the people's right to educational welfare; and implementation of the political and economic system of communitarian socialism in order to live in harmony with the planet.⁴² Morales's "ten commandments" read almost like a direct quotation from the eco-socialist declaration, "if we as a people want to save the planet and all life and humanity, then it is our duty and responsibility to end capitalism".⁴³ This first commandment is directly in line with eco-socialist rhetoric, which claims that capitalism must end if the planet and life are to survive, and it explains what motivates such radical language. Bolivia also renounces war not only because it hurts the people and only benefits transnational corporations, but also because the trillions of dollars spent on wars could be used to cure the wounded Earth.⁴⁴ It is evident that the Bolivian movement is peaceful and does not seek to impose its ideals through militaristic means. The document reiterates that the capitalist system treats the planet as a commodity and the people of Bolivia cannot rent or lease their own mother. On the contrary it calls

⁴¹ "Ten commandments to save the planet". By Evo Morales Ayma, president of the Republic of Bolivia Message to the Continental Gathering of Solidarity with Bolivia in Guatemala City. <http://wpas.worldpeacefull.com/2011/04/ten-commandments-to-save-the-planet/> The language choice for this document's title let us see the Judeo-Christian beliefs that are still evident in Bolivian culture.

⁴² Postero Nancy. The Struggles to Create a Radical Democracy in Bolivia: living in actually existing democracies. Latin American Research Review: "The international community should eradicate capitalism and substitute it with "communitarian socialism" if it hoped to save the planet from dangers like climate change." 2010, pp. 59-60.

⁴³ "Ten Commandments"

⁴⁴ "Ten Commandments."

for a defense organization to defend Mother Earth in order to bring her back to health and to re-establish a responsible and harmonious relationship with her.⁴⁵ The “ten commandments” speak to Andean cosmology and other factors that motivate the Bolivian government. They employ such strong rhetoric against capitalist nations and legitimize the claim that their intentions go beyond the desire to secure mere political or economic advantages. This document demands the autonomy of communities and asks them to be self-reliant and to consume locally.⁴⁶ The last point expresses most clearly the spirit of the “Ten Commandments” as a whole when it proposes the world “vivir bien,” or “live well.” By living well, Morales means that “people do not live at the expense of other people’s welfare.”⁴⁷ Morales urges the world to develop a socialism that is in harmony with Mother Earth and respects the different lifestyles and cultural nuances of each community.⁴⁸ In his own words, “what is needed [is to] prioritize what we produce and consume locally, end consumerism, decadence and luxury. We need to prioritize local production for local consumption, stimulating self-reliance and the sovereignty of the communities within the limits that the health and remaining resources of the planet permit.”⁴⁹ The “ten commandments,” thus, blend the eco-socialist ideas, Andean cosmology, and communitarian socialism of the Bolivian peoples.

Climate Change Proposals of the Developed Nations

The Bolivian government has devised its own activism and proposals in a close dialogue with the interventions of the largest industrialized nations on the global environmental stage.

Reconstructing the history of the global climate change debate is necessary to understand Bolivia’s critical stance toward the western approach to halting climate change. The developed nations have

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

spent the last fourteen years trying to reach an agreement on how the world should address the dangers of climate change, but have achieved only limited results. I approach the history of this debate by looking at the proposals and results of the Kyoto Protocol, the Copenhagen Summit, the Cancun Summit and the REDD policy. In 1988, the World Meteorological Organization and the United Nations Environment Program created the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change or the IPCC. The IPCC has since then published four reports or assessments concerning the global challenges and/or dangers of climate change.⁵⁰ The second and fourth assessment reports gave targets for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions to be reduced by an average of 5.2% below 1990 levels⁵¹ and in 1997 the developed nations set an agreement to reach these targets in what is known as the Kyoto Protocol.⁵²

The Kyoto Protocol in Japan was an agreement that set out to bind major polluters to carbon reduction. Kyoto stipulated that the developed nations reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by 5% from their 1990 levels by 2012.⁵³ The U.S. is the only developed nation that has not ratified the protocol, arguing that the Kyoto Protocol makes no demands on China. Since the United States is one of the world's biggest emitters of carbon (now second to China) this leaves the two biggest carbon emitters with no forthcoming agreements to set carbon emissions at pre-1990 levels.⁵⁴

The IPCC's Fourth Assessment Report, however, further motivated countries to act. Instead of focusing on the question of whether climate change is occurring and whether carbon emissions should be reduced, as the second assessment did, the fourth assessment focuses on the natural

⁵⁰ Funk and Wagnalls New World Encyclopedia, World Almanac Education Group Inc., Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2002.

⁵¹ <http://www.davidsuzuki.org/issues/climate-change/science/international-climate-negotiations/history-of-climate-negotiations/>

⁵² Funk and Wagnalls, 2002.

⁵³ Fletcher, Susan R., Parker Larry. Climate Change: The Kyoto Protocol and International Actions:RL33826 Congressional Research Service: Report1/24/2007, p.1, p.17, 3graphs.

⁵⁴ John Vidal and David Adam. China Overtakes US as World's Biggest CO2 Emitter. Guardian, UK, June 19 2007.

catastrophic consequences (like severity of weather) that will occur if reduction of emissions is not sufficient.⁵⁵ The Fourth Assessment Report also concludes that climate change is “very likely” anthropogenic or caused by human activity, through the emissions of carbon that come from transportation services, industrial practices and deforestation.⁵⁶ The scientific literature backing manmade climate change and natural disaster has engendered an increase in global summits to address the issue.

The Copenhagen Summit in December of 2009 was a direct response to the Fourth Assessment Report, and the global leaders met to try to find a solution for sustainable development alternatives and to reach agreements that would bind the developed and developing nations to the carbon reduction goals established in the Kyoto Protocol. Copenhagen addressed the world saying “As global business leaders assembled at the World Business Summit on Climate Change, we call upon our political leaders to agree on an ambitious and effective global climate treaty at COP15 in Copenhagen. Sustainable economic progress requires stabilizing and then reducing greenhouse gas emissions.⁵⁷ The goals outlined below express the need for environmental transformation:

Agreement on a science-based greenhouse gas stabilization path with 2020 and 2050 emissions reduction targets. Effective measurement, reporting and verification of emissions. Funds to make communities more resilient and able to adapt to the effects of climate change. Deployment of existing low-emissions technologies and the development of new ones. Incentives for a dramatic increase in financing low emissions technologies. Innovative means to protect forests and balance the carbon cycle.⁵⁸

The goals of COP15 are in line with the IPCC’s assessments because they aim to reduce emissions and to secure pledges from developed countries to reduce their emissions. However,

⁵⁵ Findings of the Fourth Assessment Report: Climate Change Science, Union of Concerned Scientists; Citizens and Scientists for Environmental Solutions, 2007.

⁵⁶ IPCC Fourth Assessment Report, 2007.

⁵⁷ Copenhagen Climate Council, The Copenhagen Call; CopenhagenClimateCouncil.org

⁵⁸ Ibid.

much criticism has come from both developed and developing nations, who claim that these lofty words have fallen short of actualizing any of these goals. According to many environmental journals the outcome was bleak: “In the end, all that the head of the United Nations could do was put an optimistic spin on the outcome of last month’s climate-change talks in Copenhagen. The international negotiations yielded little.”⁵⁹ The Copenhagen Accord failed to make any binding legal agreements to address climate change.

The climate change debate continued on at the Cancun Summit of 2010. The Cancun Summit formally put the pledges of developed and developing nations in UN documentation with the intention of further committing the world to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Nonetheless, little more progress was made than at the previous summits. The major proposals discussed in the Cancun Summit were focused on allowing developing countries to receive climate aid in order to offset potential losses, forest conservation, and technology transfers. The summit agreed to give money to poor countries; however, it failed to provide information as to how much money would be distributed and to whom. Cancun also introduced the idea of transferring technology to developing countries in order to promote “clean” development, but no individual country obligations were outlined.⁶⁰ The Cancun Summit is looked at as a success by some but as a continued failure of the previous negotiations by many because the proposals took place with no binding agreements.

Bolivia’s Response and the Case of REDD

Bolivia has a history of frustration with the attempts of industrialized nations to achieve binding climate change agreements, and this frustration is compounded by those nations’

⁵⁹ Hogue, Cheryl. “Shifting Climate, Government and Policy”, Vol. 88, No.2 (January 1, 2010). pp. 27-29.

⁶⁰ Vaughan, Adam. *Cancun Climate Agreements at a Glance*, Guardian.co.uk , (Dec. 13 2010).

seeming reluctance to listen to alternative proposals, as we shall see in the case study of the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) policy.

Bolivia has stated that future negotiations should extend the Kyoto Protocol after the 2012 period, asking countries to reduce emissions to 50% in the second round.⁶¹ Bolivia wants to back the IPCC literature through legally binding negotiations, but at present has not found any agreement to be either effective or binding for any nation.

Bolivia felt that the proposed targets of the Copenhagen Accords would not do enough to reduce emissions to the necessary levels nor would they protect the most vulnerable countries, such as the developing and indigenous nations, from the negative effects of climate change.⁶² Consequently, Bolivia opposed the Copenhagen Accords, and as a result the U.S. denied climate change aid to the country. The U.S. was offering \$30 billion in “climate aid” to countries that would agree to the accord as a package deal. Because Bolivia did not accept the package, it then did not receive any funds from the U.S. to address the environmental crisis.⁶³ This resulted in further criticism of the Copenhagen Accords, as the actions of the U.S. indicating to developing countries that they were expected to accept western proposals or be environmentally sanctioned. This also sent a clear message to the world not only that environmental issues were a low priority on the U.S. agenda but also that the politics and power relationships in the global system would not be set aside for the survival of the planet when a sensitive issue challenges the survival of capitalist interests.

⁶¹ The People’s Agreement, from the People’s World Conference: (April 22 2010).

⁶² Goldberg, Suzanne. US environment correspondent, *US denies climate aid to countries opposing Copenhagen Accord*: Guardian UK (April 9 2010).

⁶³ Ibid

Bolivia's loss of faith in the developed nations comes from the latter's lack of commitment, and ability to reduce carbon emissions, which result from the attempt to continue to commoditize the environment. What the indigenous demand is a complete reversal of this way of thinking and a more indigenous cosmological/eco-socialist approach to interacting with the environment. Further debate with proponents of the same neo-liberal approach to reduce emissions has motivated the Bolivian government to attempt a more radical strategy.

For example, according to the UN, the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation policy will create an incentive for countries and big polluters to invest in the preservation of forests.⁶⁴ UN documentation outlining REDD also says that it will include the indigenous peoples and their rights in the implementation of such a policy.

The Guidance provides background and context on the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples in UN programmes and activities, identifies the guiding principles in order to respect and support the rights of Indigenous Peoples and other forest dependent communities, and outlines the operational guidelines for the design and implementation of UN-REDD Programme activities at the global and national scale.⁶⁵

Redd acknowledges that the carbon stored in the trees has a financial value that the polluters and developed nations will then incorporate into the cost of conserving these forests and preventing deforestation. The money that the developing nations will make from these purchases will allow them to reduce their own emissions by investing in low carbon sustainable development.⁶⁶ Since 20% of the world's carbon emissions are released into the Earth's atmosphere by deforestation, the REDD policy seeks to give financial incentives to developing countries to conserve their forests. REDD then offers big carbon emitters among the developed nations to purchase carbon "offsets." These offsets are purchases that support the preservation of a forest. Since the area is

⁶⁴ UN-REDD.org

⁶⁵ UN-REDD Operational Guidance: Engagements of Indigenous Peoples and other forest dependent communities. March 29, 2009.

⁶⁶ Ibid

now preserved, the carbon that would have been released through deforestation is now stored in the protected forest. The weakness of the REDD program is that while it acknowledges the need for developing countries to preserve their forests, it does not state whether or not the developed nations will reduce emissions within their own country or merely buy offsets to continue the same industrial practices they have used in the past.⁶⁷

Many international environmental organizations believe that this is exactly what the problem with the REDD proposal is. Friends of the Earth International, with over two million members the largest environmental grassroots organization in the world, released a report in 2008 stating that,

If REDD is funded through carbon offsetting it will undermine current and future emissions reductions agreed to by industrialized countries. Allowing countries with carbon intensive lifestyles to continue consuming inequitably and unsustainably, by permitting them to fund cheaper forest carbon ‘offsets’ in developing countries, diverts critical resources and attention away from measures to address fossil fuel consumption and the real underlying causes of deforestation. REDD also refocuses attention on a key moral and legal dilemma – to whom, if anyone, do forests belong to? And who has the rights to sell forest carbon credits? It is certainly clear that in the absence of secure land rights, Indigenous Peoples and other forest-dependent communities have no guarantees that they will receive any form of REDD ‘incentive’ or reward for their extensive forest conservation efforts.⁶⁸

Bolivia’s UN ambassador Pablo Solon referred to this program as beneficial to expanding the carbon markets, but says that it is one that will also “reduce the obligation of developed countries to act.”⁶⁹ Evo Morales stated that REDD is based on the promotion of the carbon market, and respects neither state sovereignty nor the rights of the people to be free.⁷⁰ In fact, at the Poznan Climate Conference in 2008, Annex 1 countries such as Canada, the United

⁶⁷ Vaughan, Adam

⁶⁸ Friends of the Earth International. Redd Myths: a critical review of proposed mechanisms to reduce emissions from deforestation and degradation in developing countries. Issue, 114, (Dec. 2008).

⁶⁹ Pablo Solon, Why Bolivia stood alone in opposing the Cancun climate agreement. (Dec. 21 2010). Guardian.co.uk

⁷⁰ Speech by Evo Morales to the G77 at the UN on May 7th 2010.

States, New Zealand and Australia tried to remove the word “rights” along with the “s” in “peoples” in the REDD document. The indigenous of over 100 groups protested this move and demanded that the rights of indigenous peoples be recognized and that they as peoples do as well.⁷¹ The recognition of the phrase “indigenous peoples” was a thirty-year-long battle for the world’s indigenous that resulted in the establishment of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the UN recognition of their rights by private businesses. The countries that opposed the language recognizing indigenous rights in the REDD policy were the same countries that opposed the initial recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples under UNDRIP.⁷² The need for the developing and the developed countries to develop trust and to reach an agreement on the REDD policy is crucial. Analysts suggest that the efficacy of REDD is dependent on its ability to respect the rights of indigenous peoples.⁷³

Further distrust and criticism of developed nations by indigenous nations results from the fact that developing countries fear that the REDD policy is a ploy to exempt the industrial nations from responsibility for their own emissions while simultaneously binding the developing nations, despite the fact that policymakers have stated that REDD will not exonerate the developed nations.⁷⁴ The Bolivian government does not simply reject REDD because it is a proposal made by and supported by corporate giants, but because it has a long history in dealing with these carbon offset schemes. This opposition to carbon offset proposals can be understood in the context of how effective the Noel Kempff Climate Action Project has been in Bolivia. In 1997 Fundacion Amigos de la Naturaleza and the Nature Conservancy created a plan to protect forests from logging industries in order to offset carbon emissions. This plan is called the Noel

⁷¹ UN document, SPREP Highlights, Poznan Climate Conference 2008.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Pereira Simone Novotny Couto. “Payment for Environmental Services in the Amazon Forest: How can conservation and development be reconciled.” *The Journal of Environment and Development*, 2010. p171.

⁷⁴ UN Document SPREP Highlights, P.C.C.

Kempff Climate Action Plan (NKCAP) and is considered to be the model for future REDD policies. The Bolivian government, BP, PacifiCorp and American Electric were able to stop the logging in the Noel Kempff Park and turn it into a national park. With NKCAP the forest dwellers lost their rights to traditional lands and were given assistance to obtain lands outside of the park. Thus, people were prevented from making their traditional use of public land. Also, when the conservation of the area occurred, forest dwellers lost their jobs. Although they have received some compensation, the majority of families remain jobless.⁷⁵

Programs have been initiated to help alleviate poverty, and those programs have been beneficial to the communities. However, if areas are to be conserved then a political discourse needs to be maintained in order to protect the rights and hear the needs of the forest dwellers.⁷⁶ This makes the people's rights a very important part of the equitable continuation of the program. Given that deforestation accounts for about 20% of emissions, reducing emissions by protecting forest conservation is important in the future of climate change policy. Since indigenous rights are a factor in REDD programs, giving the indigenous a voice in these issues is crucial.

Since Bolivia, like many other countries, agrees that the current accords do nothing to address the real problems that face the environment, it has taken a proactive stance on issues of climate change, which I discuss in the next section, and has held global conferences to propose its own ideas to respond to the developed nations' inability to reach a deal.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Pereira Simone Novotny Couto. pp. 181-184.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Speech by Evo Morales to the G77 at the UN. May 7th 2010.

Climate Change Proposals of Bolivia

The First World People's Conference on Climate Change in 2010 represented a major Bolivian response to the developed nations' proposals concerning climate change. Bolivia's proposals aim to protect the people against the privatization of their lands and to protect the environment.

Bolivia not only opposed the developed nation's strategy to combat climate change at the First World's Peoples Conference, but it proposed radical alternatives that reflect the eco-social/cosmological perspectives of the indigenous peoples. As a result of the failure to combat the real issues of climate change and to protect the rights of the inhabitants of indigenous lands from infringement by the carbon market via such proposals as REDD, Bolivia has proposed as an alternative the ground-breaking "Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth."

The declaration is a proposal based on ancient Andean concepts that are now being articulated to protect the rights of indigenous peoples and the planet from the encroachment of privatization. In this document the eco-socialist/cosmological ideology is apparent throughout. This declaration, which is now national law in Bolivia, is being presented to the UN as well and is receiving growing support from environmental leaders from around the world.⁷⁸ The overall message in the declaration is that the planet is deserving of the same basic right to life as human beings. The first article states that Mother Earth is a living being consisting of beings that are all interrelated, each of which is defined by its integral relationship with her. The declaration states that all beings, whether they are organic or inorganic, have inherent rights without distinction among them. It states that each being has a role to play in the harmonious functioning of

⁷⁸ Preamble from the Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth, given at the World's Peoples Conference: (April 24th 2010).

Mother Earth.⁷⁹ The cosmological ideologies of the indigenous permeate this article and throughout its entirety. The acknowledgement of Mother Earth's rights and the responsibility of humans to live in harmony with nature clearly represents the Andean cosmological perspective.

The Declaration is also infused with eco-socialist ideology as it blames the capitalist system for the environmental crisis.⁸⁰ In the preamble it states, "We the peoples and nations of the Earth... recognizing that the capitalistic system and all forms of depredation, exploitation, abuse and contamination have caused a great destruction, degradation and disruption of Mother Earth, putting life as we know it today at risk through phenomena such as climate change." The document recognizes that the larger problem is capitalism, which in essence is the overarching model for the neo-liberal tools used to acquire these resources. Thus, the declaration calls upon all nations and all public and private institutions to implement and enforce all the rights and obligations outlined in the declaration. In short, the nations and the institutions of the world need to support an economic system that is in harmony with Mother Earth.⁸¹ This statement makes clear that Bolivia, is trying to restrain the system of global capitalism through its environmental policy. If Bolivians are able to preserve the Earth and prevent the privatization of its resources, they could also prevent private companies from using western climate change proposals to "promote the carbon market." They could also reclaim ownership of their lands from foreign and private interests. This is indeed the most challenging confrontation of global capitalism by the indigenous government.

⁷⁹ Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth, Article 1.

⁸⁰ In the preamble it states, "We the peoples and nations of the Earth... recognizing that the capitalistic system and all forms of depredation, exploitation, abuse and contamination have caused a great destruction, degradation and disruption of Mother Earth, putting life as we know it today at risk through phenomena such as climate change."

⁸¹ Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth.

This ideological struggle is gaining ground and momentum in the United Nations. In April of 2009, the indigenous peoples of the world held a summit in Anchorage, Alaska. At the Indigenous Peoples Global Summit on Climate Change (IPGSCC), the people presented the United Nations with a declaration that is a direct representation of the eco-socialist/cosmological perspective of the indigenous peoples. The Anchorage Declaration asserts that humans are inextricable from the natural elements of the Earth. It states that the indigenous peoples recognize that the climate crisis is caused by current economic systems. It expresses the cosmological idea that the indigenous peoples are the defenders of Mother Earth.⁸² This rhetoric acknowledges the ecological ideas that capitalism is responsible for the climate crisis and the cosmological perspective by recognizing the indigenous as defenders of the Earth. Through these ideologies the indigenous peoples are standing on a global platform to express their spirituality and knowledge of how to stand up against the major causes of climate change. They call for an end to dependency on fossil fuels. They stress that they, as guardians of the planet are to be involved in the climate change processes by sharing their ideas on how to combat the crisis. They acknowledge that REDD policies need to respect the rights of the indigenous peoples to the land before imposing conservation practices on communities.⁸³ The Anchorage Declaration challenges the world to abandon false solutions to climate change, such as creating a market for carbon through the carbon offsets program. Here they challenge the western notion that creating a market for reducing emissions is going to be effective in confronting the climate crisis, arguing that such markets actually do nothing to combat emissions. This ideology is in direct accord with Bolivian government's criticisms of the western approach to climate change.⁸⁴

⁸² Anchorage Declaration, UN Document, 2009.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Anchorage Declaration, UN Document, 2009.

At the IPGSCC, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) acknowledged the Anchorage Declaration as being essential to the progress of the climate change movement. In his closing statements, the UNFCCC's president said that the indigenous people have shifted the focus so that they have become the primary actors in the movement. He stated that the climate crisis makes it clear that the world needs to change its lifestyle and how it interacts with Mother Earth. He stated that the UN stands with the indigenous leaders of the environmental movement and notes that it is they who must fully participate in the policy making-processes within the UN.⁸⁵ Finally, the president at the Summit said that the Anchorage Declaration is changing the dominant mindset about the environmental movement and that, it is clear that the indigenous are responsible for that ideological shift. The UN also acknowledged Evo Morales and the Bolivian government as the voice and leader of the indigenous peoples in the environmental movement. The president concluded by thanking the indigenous peoples for standing up and taking "their rightful place as defenders of Mother Earth."⁸⁶

Thus it appears that cosmological and eco-social ideologies are changing the minds of the dominant actors involved in global environmental policy. This suggests that Bolivia is gaining more influence around the world as people realize that their indigenous populations have substantial and potentially effective ideas to confront the most threatening problems that face the world such as climate catastrophe. This recognition by the UN is history in the making as Bolivia continues to blaze a trail toward true environmental preservation. The indigenous government of the last five years has had a greater impact on policy-making discussions concerning the environment and indigenous rights than any other government before it. The

⁸⁵ At the Closing of the Indigenous Peoples' Global Summit on Climate Change, UN Document, Anchorage, Alaska, April 24 2009.

⁸⁶ Ibid

General Assembly of the UN “has approved five resolutions initiated by the Plurinational State of Bolivia. Four were approved by consensus, and one in a vote with no country opposed (the resolution on the Human Right to Water and Sanitation). Never before in the history of Bolivian diplomacy has the country had such an impact in the UN.”⁸⁷ One of these resolutions is Bolivia’s “Harmony with Nature” which states “human beings are an inseparable part of nature”. The UN seeks to advance this discourse in the years of 2012 and 2014.⁸⁸ The government is gaining influence on a global level unlike anything that has never been seen before in Bolivia’s history.

Conclusion

Bolivia has a history of combating western policy. In the period from its imposition in the 1980’s to 2005, neo-liberalism was effectively expelled from Bolivia, yet Bolivians did not stop at the national level. They have since taken the fight to the global level. Bolivia is forcing countries to recognize and acknowledge the downfalls and shortcomings of capitalism by presenting proposals and solutions to protect the rights of Mother Earth. Their proposals are motivated by a long dissatisfaction with neo-liberal policies and a crucial ideological difference between western and non-western understandings of how humans view themselves in nature. They are also motivated by a belief that the capitalist system is responsible for the environmental crisis. Bolivia’s unprecedented participation and activism against climate change constitutes a unique attempt to position its government on an equal footing with the developed nation’s leadership on global affairs. Bolivian activism in the global summits comes from an ancestral belief that they are the defenders of the Earth and is an effort to restore balance to the world. Despite the seemingly radical language in which eco-socialists call for an end to capitalism, the

⁸⁷ UN approves two more resolution by Bolivia, *Bolivia Weekly*, (Dec. 23 2010).

⁸⁸ Ibid.

Bolivian communitarian socialism is a peaceful movement towards an egalitarian society in which the restoration and balance of the Earth coupled with social equality will be actualized. Bolivia has now begun to receive global support and recognition to of its trailblazing legislation. As the leaders in the fight to protect the environment, they have opened a door for others to follow in the hope of a better future in which humanity can live in sync with Mother Earth and all humans can “vivir bien.”

By simultaneously drawing on their ancestral beliefs and 21st century eco-socialist critiques of capitalism, Bolivians have created a unique approach to social movement and government policies for times of ecological crisis. Such an approach reasserts the identities of Andeans as children of the Earth and validates their ancestral practices of reciprocity. They now propose a new horizon where “vivir bien” as a human does not mean ignoring the primordial foundations of life on earth. “Vivir bien” is a call to completely change a collapsing lifestyle based on the premises of an unchecked search for profits and the reduction of humans to consumers. It is, perhaps, our only hope.

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